

Panel: “America As a Work in Progress”

Sara Jackson

Title: “A Dinner Party is Not a Revolution: The Founders, The Agendas, and the Compromise of 1790”

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Sara Jackson will receive her A.A. in History, as well as a Certificate in International Studies, at the end of the current semester. She will continue her studies at IPFW with the support of the Withers Scholarship; Sara plans to pursue a B.A. in English with concentrations in Language and Writing and minors in French and Medieval Studies. Her continuing research interests include the implications of the use of space within the academic Writing Center, the anti-monarchical propaganda of both the French and Russian revolutions, the importance of the differing Federalist and republican ideologies within the early American republic, and the artistic and linguistic evidence of cultural synthesis found within the Bayeux Tapestry. This is Sara’s second year participating in this conference, and she has also presented on various topics at the IPFW Student Research & Creative Endeavor Poster Symposium, the Indiana University Undergraduate Research Conference, and the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference. Her paper, “‘Gens Anglorum’ & ‘Normanitas’: The Bayeux Tapestry and the Effects of the Norman Conquest on Language and the Arts” was published in the fall of 2013 in *Primary Source*, the Indiana University Undergraduate Journal of History. A member of the Honors Program at IPFW, this summer will be Sara's third spent in Europe, working at the Cannes Film Festival and exploring Paris as far as her meager budget will allow.

Abstract

It has long been acknowledged that the so-called Dinner Table Bargain, or Compromise of 1790, is, perhaps, the greatest successful negotiation in American political history. While the majority of scholars agree on the basics of the encounter – which is based upon the admittedly biased and after-the-fact account of Thomas Jefferson – there are aspects to the event that remain unexplored, primarily due to a lack of alternative primary sources. This paper considers the major players within the scope of the bargain, including Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, as well as those intimately concerned with the debates surrounding both the residency and assumption issues; specifically, the research focuses on the individual goals of each participant and how the eventual bargain realized those objectives.

Looking at the personal papers of the founders, scholarship on the establishment of the District of Columbia, records surrounding the question of the assumption of state debts as part of Hamilton’s financial plans, and biographical accounts of each of these forefathers has afforded the opportunity to better understand the motivations of each of the statesmen. Yet, another important factor is how each undertook to accomplish their aims; this proves especially relevant when discussing the facts of the compromise and making inferences about the aspects of the event that remain unknown. I argue that the historically accepted narrative of the bargain has been significantly oversimplified in terms of the involvement of third parties, and that a true appreciation of the magnitude of the compromise requires a closer examination via the lenses of

partisan and national sentiment.

Bibliographical Note

In beginning this paper, historiographies that focused on the early American republic were instrumental in identifying several additional relevant secondary sources in addition to a limited number of primary sources. The holdings within the Indiana University library system yielded much of what was required in the way of the personal papers of those involved in the Compromise of 1790, especially those composed and exchanged within the months preceding and following the evening in question, in June of that year. Further, the examination of sketches and full biographies of the statesmen involved in the compromise allowed for the inclusion of information that has proven instrumental in clearly understanding the aims of each man with respect to these larger policy issues. Articles and books that review the compromise are relatively plentiful, but several key sources also focus on either the residency debate or the question of assumption; these were especially helpful in establishing a clearer context of supporters and opponents to each piece of legislation, as well as providing a narrower - and thereby more in-depth - emphasis. A great debt is owed especially to the *William & Mary Quarterly*, within whose volumes were found several articles which specifically address the dinner table bargain in detail, and to Joseph J. Ellis' *Founding Brothers*, which features the account of the compromise that initially piqued interest in this research.

